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THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH

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The church has come to have an enduring place not only in history but in thought. At least since the writing of *The City of God* it has decided some of the most vital questions confronting us because of a peculiar sanctity attached to it. It is not therefore out of place to demand from time to time that it show us its credentials. The present essay is an attempt to discover if there is anything peculiarly sacred about the manner of its founding that would justify us in ascribing unique spiritual authority to it.

And the surprising fact which we discover is, that we cannot discover any actual founding of the church whatever. We cannot be sure that the church was founded in any accurate sense of that term; it is probably more in accord with the facts to say that the movement which eventually became known as the church grew. Creation by fiat seems as mythical in this sphere as in more material realms. It seems as if there were a church almost before its members knew it.

In endeavoring to show that the founding of the church is obscure and to discover some reasons for such obscurity, we shall be obliged to see if we can trace the rise of the idea of the church in the minds of the early friends and disciples of Jesus. Of course ideas and words are never quite conterminous. A word never covers an idea. If a word is laid on top of an idea, the idea peeps out all around it. Yet at the same time before an idea can clothe itself with a word it is in a pre-natal state and cannot be said to be properly born. And so, it seems to me, our first, but not our only, duty in attempting to

come upon the birth-hour of the Christian church, is to discover, if we may, when the word "church" was first applied either by its friends or its foes or its members to the group of people who were held together by common devotion to Jesus of Nazareth, whom they recognized as the Christ.

Strictly speaking, there is only one thing to say: that we do not know when this word was first applied. But because we cannot know precisely, we are not excused from finding out all that we can know; because our sources are not all that we would wish them to be, there is no good reason for refusing to find out from them all that they have to tell us. We must therefore examine those early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles which contain virtually all that has even the faintest suggestion of being first-hand information about the earliest months and years in and about Jerusalem after the death of Jesus.

There are so few things that are certain about the authorship of the historical books of the New Testament that it is refreshing to come upon one of the few in connection with this book of the Acts. There can be no doubt that it was written by the same hand as that which wrote the Third Gospel. In the preface to that Gospel, the author virtually tells us that he has consulted various sources for information. The structure and language of the Acts lead us to the supposition that when he came to write the Acts he followed the practice he had used in writing the Gospel. Students of the book have fathered many theories concerning its structure, but they have had most to say about two sources which many of them have believed to underlie this work. One of these is the familiar "We" source, so called because of the sudden and unexplained appearance of the first personal pronoun in some of the later travels of Paul; the other has been even more vaguely denominated and it has been sup-

posed to underlie the first, say, twelve chapters of the book, which are devoted to giving us a picture of the beginnings of the church in Jerusalem. Harnack, who has recently made a valiant attempt to identify the author of the "We" passages with the author of the entire work, still admits Luke's use of probably written sources for the first portion of the book. The book itself cannot have been written of course before the last event therein narrated—the arrival of Paul in Rome. By that time, as the letters of Paul testify, the word "church" was applied as a matter of course to the local Christian communities. The author of the Acts, a Pauline admirer, would, therefore, be accustomed to use the word "church" for the various groups of Christian disciples of whom he was writing and in particular for the church at Jerusalem, which Paul so peculiarly revered. Under these circumstances, we must attribute either to a phenomenal intuition or to his sources the astonishing fact that until "the persecution against the church that was in Jerusalem" arose on the outburst and martyrdom of Stephen, we have only one single instance of the use of the word "church" for the Christian circle.

We hear of the filling out of the apostolate, of the descent of the spirit in the upper room, of the large addition to the Christian company through the inspired speech of Peter, of the first startling miracle performed by him and John, of the imprisonment of the apostles and their courage and release, of the growth of the "multitude which believed" and of their brotherly life, and though it seems to us the most natural thing in the world to speak of these events as the beginnings of the church, that notable word is not once employed. We are further instructed concerning the deceit and death of Ananias and Sapphira, of the renewed imprisonment and release of the apostles, of the strife between the Hellenists and the Hebrews, of the appointment of seven men to see that they were

treated equally in the distribution of food, of the character and genius of Stephen, of his epoch-making speech in the temple, of the rage of his hearers and of his martyrdom; and though we should expect the word "church" in every paragraph, it occurs but once as a designation of the disciples. And its occurrence is neither in connection with any of the pivotal events of these stirring days, nor in the heart of any of the narratives, nor in those wonderful speeches of Peter and Stephen, so full of verisimilitude and breathing the spirit of the most primitive Christian theology; we find it in what I think may, under these circumstances, be confidently regarded as one of those seams with which an author is accustomed to join together independent narratives. Just at the close of the story of the death of Ananias and Sapphira, and before the transition to the healing ministry of Peter and the imprisonment of the apostles, we read these words: "And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard these things." This is the solitary use of that classic word in The Book of the Acts until the time of Stephen. Instead of this word "church," which we should have used constantly and which all our teachers use constantly in the retelling of these brilliant narratives, we find other words, much less pretentious, to us much less characteristic—"believers," "brethren," "their own company," and "disciples." Of these the word "disciples" seems to be the technical word or to be becoming the technical word for this untechnical group of people who were expecting their Lord from heaven. It might have remained such, had not, as we read, "the disciples been called Christians first at Antioch." Indeed until, in the last part of the eleventh chapter, after the conversion of both Paul and Cornelius has been recorded, we get to Antioch, whither certain men of Cyprus and Cyrene fled on the death of Stephen and where they preached the Lord Jesus to Greeks as

well as Jews, the word "church" is used only in the seams of the narrative. Even in those seams, it occurs but four times and save for the obviously editorial sentence, "So the church had peace," it does not occur at all in that portion of the early chapters of Acts which on altogether other grounds Harnack assigns to the ancient Jerusalemic source (behind which he places Philip as guarantor).

This peculiar state of affairs must not be dismissed from our minds until we have inquired whether it may have any historical significance for our inquiry concerning the origin of the church.

I have said that the word "church" was never used in the heart of the early narratives or in the course of the early speeches to describe the disciples of Jesus. But once in the midst of Stephen's speech we find these words: "This is he [that Moses] . . . which was in the church in the wilderness with the angel that spake to him in the mount Sinai." The word "church," though apparently not applied to the Christian groups in the earliest times, was applied by a prominent member of those groups to the Israelitish nation quite as a matter of course. That this is no mere accident is abundantly proved by reference to the Septuagint. Here we find the word "ecclesia," "church," used 71 times to translate "kahal" or its derivatives. It is also used 23 times in those parts of the Septuagint for which we have no Hebrew original. It is always employed as the equivalent of our word "assembly" or "company." It is the word usually employed to denote the assembly of Israel, in what we should call the ecclesiastical or exclusive sense. When, for example, we read that "an Ammonite and a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of God forever," the word for "assembly" is the word "ecclesia." When it is said that "the transgressor shall be cut off from the assembly of my people," it is again the word "ecclesia"

that is used. I think therefore Harnack is on the whole right in saying (*Ausbreitung*, page 292): "In the Septuagint 'ecclesia' is the word by which 'kahal' is translated, the most sacred word for the entire nation, whereas 'synagogue' is used to translate 'edhah,' a more secular word."

It therefore seems proper to suppose that the reason why the early Christians did not employ the word "church" to designate their own gatherings is because they used it to designate the assembly of the Jews to which they still regarded themselves as belonging. And that the author of the Acts preserved this interesting fact in his sources may be due to his knowledge of the Septuagint from which his Old Testament citations are taken.

While the fact that the early disciples of Jesus still regarded themselves as "Hebrews of the Hebrews" is well-known of course to scholars, though not always duly appreciated even by them, it is widely ignored by most of us. This ignorance of ours makes it still difficult for us to do justice to the position and the emotions of that mother "church" in Jerusalem. It is, however, written clearly on the records that the early Christians "were daily in the temple praising God," that the apostles "went up to the temple at the hour of prayer," after they had seen the risen Lord just as they had before, that Solomon's porch was their place of assembly, and that they preached in the temple—and probably in the synagogues—as those who felt themselves there at home.

The old Latin prologue to Mark's Gospel asserts that Mark, after having become a Christian, cut off his thumb so that he should not be eligible for the priesthood. This tradition confirms the letter and the spirit of the early chapters of Acts, and indicates that to the Jews faith in Jesus as Christ did not disqualify a man for ritual service in the holy place so surely as the lack of a thumb. Nothing was further from the minds of the disciples than

to cut themselves off from the church or assembly of the Jews. Why should they take such a step? They alone among their people had been permitted to recognize the Messiah. Soon their leader was to descend from heaven to restore the kingdom to Israel and to choose from their group those who were to reign over the tribes of the nation. Would such a confident hope lead them to make less or more of those laws which had been given to prepare the way of the Lord and which they had kept in company with him? He was crucified not for denouncing the Jews but for claiming to be the Jews' prince. They had not separated from their church when they were baptized by John; thereby they had been only more surely admitted into membership of the coming kingdom of the Messiah. And when either at Pentecost or at the time of the earthquake they had been baptized with the Holy Ghost, they were not thereby separated from their people; they were merely given the power to bring that kingdom in. More than ever they recognized themselves as necessary to the redemption and to the exaltation of the Jewish nation. It was they who were to enable their countrymen to repent so that their sins might be blotted out and in consequence the Lord might be sent from heaven. Hence they called themselves "believers" as distinguished from their unbelieving countrymen, "disciples" as distinguished from crucifiers and mockers of their Messiah, and "brethren" as their Lord had indeed already called them; but the thought of cutting themselves off from the church of the Jews, the assembly of the people of God, did not occur to them for a long time. And until it so occurred to them, the church of Jesus Christ, in any accurate sense of the words, as distinguished from the church of the Jewish people, could not have been founded.

When we ask ourselves, therefore, regarding the founding of the Christian church, we ask ourselves to discover

the point of time or the point of consciousness when the Christian disciples regarded themselves not as a part of the Jewish nation but as a substitute for the Jewish nation, not as belonging to the people of God but as constituting the people of God.

And here it may be well to repeat the statement which was made at the outset and which I hope has become already better established. We cannot come upon any one moment of history when the church was founded; we cannot tell whether the church was founded; it is probably more in accord with the facts to say that it grew. For our sources do not record any final and explicit break of the disciples with the Jewish nation, though I think they do record such a change of their relations with the Jewish church at one particular point and perhaps also at one particular place that we may say that then the church consciousness, absent before, had arisen.

As we set sail upon our voyage of discovery, I am obliged to report that nearly all the works on church history have glided rather vaguely and ambiguously over the foundation of the Christian Church. They have not only failed to report the founding of the church whose history they undertake to narrate, but they seem to have been oblivious of their own failure.

And now, beginning our search for that moment when the early disciples regarded themselves as the holy group which had been substituted in the favor of God for the ancient people of Israel, we find five events which chiefly call for our scrutiny. It may also be said that these five events seem to stand out more or less vaguely to the church historians as somehow or other marking the beginning of the church.

The first of these events occurred while our Lord was yet upon the earth, going himself habitually into the synagogue on the Sabbath and regarding the temple as his Father's house. It is that solemn moment that

is set aside for us all from other moments of time, when at Caesarea Philippi, on a brief retirement from the confines of Palestine, Simon Peter recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. Now there can be no question that that moment marked the definite recognition of the supreme authority of Jesus Christ, and that it helped to give to the words spoken on the mount and by the sea, to the parables of the publican and the prodigal and the ministering Samaritan, the carrying power through which they swept through—and swept out—the world. But does that recognition of Jesus as the Messiah amount to the laying of the corner stone of the Christian Church? There is no such thought in the earliest of the Gospels which report the event. Only in the Gospel of Matthew do we find an interpolation in the older account which might be construed in that sense. There we read that Jesus blessed Peter for recognizing him as the Messiah, and added, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

It is to this passage that those resort who like to call Jesus “the Founder of the Church.” But there are three reasons which render it impossible to believe that we have here to do with such an event. In the first place, the verb is in the future rather than in the present tense. If Jesus is to be regarded as the personal Founder of the church, it must be at some future and undiscoverable moment. In the second place, the words, if spoken by Jesus, would almost inevitably have been treasured with his most sacred utterances. It is well-nigh inconceivable that Mark would have omitted them as too unimportant to mention, or that they would have found—as seems the case—no place in the Logia, the earliest collection of Jesus’ sayings. The fact that the word “church” is never put into Jesus’ mouth in the New Testament except here and in another passage in this same Gospel of

Matthew is very significant. And the second passage bears even more unmistakable marks of a late origin. There Jesus is represented as saying, "If a brother sin against thee and thou tell it to the church, and he refuse to hear the church, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican." Not only the word "church" but the words "Gentile" and "publican" seem utterly out of place on Jesus' lips, in the significance in which they are used. Moreover the conception of Jesus' band of disciples as a disciplinary organization seems quite unhistorical. If Jesus used the words at all, the church to which he alluded was the Jewish Church and not the Christian one. And in the third place, we are confident that the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah does not mark the founding of the Christian Church because after that recognition Jesus went with his disciples into the temple and purified its courts, and partook of the feast of the passover with his disciples, as though they were all still members of the Jewish Church. In it, indeed, he had peculiar power, but to it he and they alike belonged. The break with the Jews had not yet come.

Weizsäcker and Bacon are at one in regarding Peter rather than Jesus as the Founder of the church. They regard him as such, however, not because of his recognition of Jesus at Caesarea Philippi as the Messiah, but because he was the first to whom Christ was revealed in resurrection glory. "He appeared to Peter"—this phrase out of the 15th of 1st Corinthians seems to them to point to a greater vision of Peter than any he had while Jesus walked by his side, and in virtue of which he became the founder of the Christian Church. Yet they hesitate to say definitely that the appearance of Jesus to Peter marked the founding of the church; the event was too personal for that, and, as personal, it has quite disappeared from the narrative of the Acts. McGiffert, who inclines to the belief that Peter was the

“second founder of the church” (*Apostolic Age*, page 48) does, however, single out another definite moment—of great importance in Christian history—for our attention in seeking for the origin of the church. “That Christianity has had a history,” he writes (*Apostolic Age*, page 42), “is due to the fact that these disciples did not go back disheartened to their old pursuits and live on as if they had never known Jesus, but that on the contrary, filled with the belief that their Master still lived and conscious of holding a commission from him, they banded themselves together with the resolve of completing his work and preparing their countrymen for his return. Their resolve, put into execution when they left Galilee and returned to Jerusalem, marks the real starting-point in the history of the church.” If indeed they came to any such clear-cut resolve, the moment of that resolve plays an important part in the gathering together of Christian believers, but that gathering would have regarded itself not as a church but as a favored group within the Jewish Church. Preuschen, who also emphasizes the place of Peter among the Christian disciples, seems better to express the facts when he says, “Peter gathered a company of like-minded people, but without giving up communion with the Jewish people and the Jewish faith.”¹

The Day of Pentecost is the third great moment in the history of Christianity which has been hit upon for the founding of the Christian Church, which seems so curiously to baffle our search. Of all these moments it seems most widely chosen for this great honor. “While the apostles and disciples,” writes Philip Schaff, “about one hundred and twenty in number, no doubt mostly Galileans, were assembled before the morning devotions of the festal day and were waiting in prayer for the

¹ *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, p. 37. Das Altertum, bearbeitet von Erwin Preuschen.

fulfilment of the promise, the exalted Saviour sent from his heavenly throne the Holy Spirit upon them and founded his church upon earth. The church of the new covenant was ushered into existence with startling signs which filled the spectators with wonder and fear" (*History of the Christian Church*, I, page 228). And George P. Fisher, not quite so certainly, writes (*History of the Christian Church*, page 19), "With the day of Pentecost the career of the 'Church Militant' fairly begins." And Wilhelm Möller, still more cautiously, says (*Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, Vol. I, page 50), "The Spirit, proceeding from the Ascended One, not the earthly manifestation of Jesus nor his teaching in itself, is the really church-founding [element], yet even this [is to be taken] in the sense that the separation of this particular fellowship from the general religious-national fellowship of the Jewish people was first the result of a gradual process."

But the result of that outpouring of the spirit—whether it took place, as most scholars believe, on the Day of Pentecost, or as Harnack believes, in connection with an earthquake, during which Peter and John were released from prison—was not the founding of a church but the preaching to brethren of an already established church by those who were thus spiritually endowed from on high. So far was Peter, who was the spokesman of those thus filled with the spirit, from thinking that a new church had been founded and that he had been cut off from his people, that he appealed to his fellow Jewish Church members to hear the prophet of whom Moses had testified, saying, "Every soul that heareth not that prophet shall be cut off from among the people." Peter evidently expected that the Lord was about to purify that ancient church, which had been almost "since the world began." It is impossible therefore to think that the Day of Pentecost marks the moment when the disciples believed themselves to supplant the children of Israel as the

chosen people of God. They were reformers, not revolutionists.

The fourth event, of sufficient importance to call for a brief mention, is the choice of seven men by the early believers to see to it that equitable division of food and necessities of life was made between the Jewish and Hellenistic widows among the disciples in Jerusalem. It is hard for us not to use the word "church" in this connection, but it does not appear to have entered into the mind of the author of the Acts; "When the number of the disciples was multiplying," is the sentence with which he introduces the narrative. This incident was enhanced in its importance for a long time by the almost universal belief among church historians that it marked the institution of the diaconate, thereby regarded as the earliest body of which they had positive information in the early church. A more careful reading of the account, however, has brought to light that these seven men were chosen for a temporary and definite task, and that they are never once named deacons in the book which narrates their selection by the disciples. Their selection thereupon does not betray any church-consciousness.

There is left for our final scrutiny an event that is connected with one of these seven men who were chosen to oversee the distribution of food among the widows of the disciples in Jerusalem. Stephen had engaged in serious and keen dispute with the members of one of the synagogues in Jerusalem. It is not altogether clear what that dispute was about. But so fundamental was it in character that his opponents summoned him before the council and the high priest called upon him for his defence. Nothing can be clearer than that Stephen was recognized as a Jew in regular standing, and that he recognized the high-priest as the chief power in the church to which he felt that he belonged and concerning which indeed by that very title he spoke in the defence that he made before

the council. To him the church was still the Jewish church, the people of God. In his defence, he seems to have laid emphasis on two quite diverse points—the blindness of heart that had always characterized Israel, and the temporary character of all buildings made with hands, whether synagogue, tabernacle, or even temple. The report of his speech is too fragmentary for us to be certain concerning his thought. That he mentioned Jesus is clear, but precisely what he said about him we cannot tell. It seems, however, overwhelmingly probable that he set him higher than Moses both before God and in the church of the Jewish people. At the close of his defence the council and the witnesses stoned him to death. Thus they separated him from the people of God, from the church, in the manner prescribed in the law. The disciples were aware that he had been stoned for the convictions which many of them shared. It may be that the closest friends of Jesus did not agree with Stephen in what he may have said about the temporary character of Jewish institutions, for we read that the apostles remained at Jerusalem during the persecution which now broke out there upon the disciples. But a great number of the most loyal Christians were compelled to flee from the sacred city, under a virtual sentence of excommunication from the church to which they had up to that time given most devoted adhesion. The authorities of the church of God had denied their right to partake of the worship of the temple and of the privileges and promises of the fathers. What was to be done? In the Book of Acts we read: “They therefore that were scattered abroad upon the tribulation that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none save only to the Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene”—of the very synagogue to which Stephen seems to have been attached—“who, when they were

come to Antioch, spake unto the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass that even for a whole year they were gathered together in the church, and that the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch."

The fact that in this short passage, which I have curtailed in citing, the infrequent word "church" occurs twice, has some significance, particularly as it occurs in the heart of the narrative; but the striking thing is that the disciples were no longer Jews either in their own eyes or in the eyes of outsiders. They were a new company, made up of Jews and Greeks, a new religious group, whose main characteristics were developed from their allegiance to a Christ, whatever that term may have meant to those who first dubbed them by the immortal nickname "Christian." But we can tell what it meant to the disciples. To all of them, whether Greeks or Jews, Jesus was the Christ. Certainly here has arisen the consciousness of being a peculiar people of God, of having a standing with the Messiah, which the Jews as such no longer shared with them. Throughout the book of the Acts we find a continual sense of the turning from the Jews, who rejected their own Christ, to the Gentiles, who accepted the Jewish Christ and yet no longer the Jewish Christ. For, as the Fourth Gospel has it, he had come "unto his own and his own had received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood but of God." Jesus soon ceased to be the prince of the Jewish nation and became "the Head of all things to the church, which is the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." The church was the kingdom of God; in it Jesus reigned; to it he brought his gifts. It was the saints in Corinth and Rome and Ephesus that were to judge the angels. They were in time past no people, but they had become the people of God. When this feeling arose, the word "church," heretofore used to denote assemblies which con-

sidered themselves sacred, whether of Diana in Ephesus or of the people of Jehovah, was naturally applied to the Christian disciples. It was applied at first perhaps to all Christian disciples in their capacity of people of God, but it soon became common to call each local Christian assembly by that name.

I do not wish to be understood as locating the origin of the church by detecting the presence or absence of any single word. The word "church" had never come in the Septuagint to have a strictly sacred meaning. For example, there occurs in the Psalms the phrase, "the assembly of evil doers," where the word which is translated by "assembly" in English is translated by "ecclesia" in Greek. We must by no means decide the origin of the church by the mere use of the Greek word for it. And yet I feel that, roughly speaking, the growth of the idea "church" among the disciples may be said to coincide with the use of the word "ecclesia" to designate their gatherings. And I find very great significance in Epiphanius' declaration — which seems to bewilder some of the historians — that the Jewish Christians rejected the word "church" as a designation for their gatherings in favor of the word "synagogue." They could not bring themselves to give their enduring allegiance to anything but the Jewish Church nor to find in Jesus anything but the Jewish Messiah, whom they were fortunate enough to recognize. I feel that Weizsäcker is right in affirming that the Christians in general would not call themselves a synagogue, because they believed themselves to be in possession of the kingdom of God and to constitute the church of God. "The church of God" appears to be the first name rather than "the church of Christ," because it was "the people of God" and not "the people of Christ" for which it was substituted (cf. Gal. 1 22, Acts 20 28, 1 Thess. 1 1, *Apostolisches Zeitalter*, pages 39–40).

But it is not the use of the word "church" upon which I would place the chief emphasis. It is used but 23 times in the entire book of the Acts, that is to say, infrequently even after the founding of the church in Antioch. It is true that while it is little used, and not used at all in most of the early chapters of the Acts where we should have constantly expected it, it is used constantly in the letters of Paul. But as I have said, we must not depend upon the use of a word to point us to the moment when the thing the word denotes arose. Our idea of the founding of the church depends in large degree upon the connotation of the word "church" for us. It seems to me that by the word "church" the early Christians meant the peculiar people of God. In Sohm's masterly *Kirchenrecht* the church is defined as "a gathering of the New Testament Covenant people before and with God." That they were His peculiar covenant people seems to have dawned upon them in Antioch, or going to Antioch, where they were first set off from the rest of the world as Christians at about the time when that nickname was first fastened upon them. Therefore it seems to me correct to say that the church—in the sense in which its first members understood it—was founded neither by the Lord (save as all things were believed to be under His control) nor by Peter, neither at Caesarea Philippi nor at the Day of Pentecost, but when, after the excommunication of Stephen, the disciples found themselves banished from the church of the Jews and yet not without God or hope in the world. It was founded in part by those who upon that persecution went everywhere preaching the word—and making a people out of those who had never been a people—and partly also by the council of the Jews who stoned Stephen as he was calling upon God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

If this be true, or in the direction of the truth, the

exact moment of the founding of the church cannot be marked off accurately, nor is it important so to mark it off. The church was an outgrowth of historical development and came into being through the opposition of the foes of Jesus to the claim of his friends to a place in the church of the Jews to which he and they had alike belonged and which was unspeakably precious to them all. Stephen and those who stoned him must be regarded as the most likely founders of the Christian Church.

These beginnings of the Christian Church justify two considerations. In the first place, neither Jesus nor his earliest disciples were separatists. They did not separate. They were separated by the authorities from the church to which they belonged. The love of Jesus for the Jewish Church, for its temple and its synagogues, is apt in our time to be obscured. He began his public career at Nazareth by employing the opportunity open to Jewish teachers in the synagogue. Among the events which brought about his death, his startling cleansing of the temple occupies a prominent place. To him the Jewish temple was a house of prayer for all nations, a place where all men were to find access to their God, as children in a Father's house, a place wide enough for him and inexpressibly sacred to him. He realized that the Jewish people needed a new conception of the mercy and loving-kindness of their God. But there was nothing further from his mind than the proclamation of a new God or the establishment of a new family. He appealed constantly to the Scriptures as an authority against the newer traditions of his time. He had no wish to separate from the Ten Commandments and from the twenty-third Psalm. He had only come to fulfil the expectations of men whom he regarded as the very spokesmen of God. One of the great problems of New Testament study is the degree to which he opened the

Kingdom of Heaven to any save Jewish believers. The God he revered was the God of his fathers; it was of that God that he believed himself the Son. We cannot of course conceive that he believed Jews only to have a duty toward God, but, unless our sources utterly deceive us, he believed that the highest duty men could have was toward the God of the Jews. A Bible without the New Testament is to us an absurdity; a Bible without the Old Testament would have been to him a blasphemy; perhaps we ought to say that any other Bible than the Old Testament was for him unthinkable. Be that as it may, Jesus was anything but a dogmatist; he was not beginning religious history *de novo*; the majestic utterances of the Jewish prophets were to him a revelation of the eternal God. Inclusion and reverence were the marks of his religious temper; the fanaticism and narrowness of come-outers seem completely foreign to his spirit; he came to expand and not to contract the boundaries of the family of God. I am sure that he would regard any holy fellowship as incomplete which did not include the sublime ethical monotheists from whom he sprang. What he would have us remember is that he died not by the Jews but for them.

And the second consideration is this: the spirit of Jesus was much more important to our Lord than the church of Jesus. With the one he would have identified himself; of the other he knew nothing. If we must choose between the spirit of Jesus without a church and the church of Jesus without his spirit, we will choose the former. Undue attention to the organization of the church and to its useful ceremonies has blurred, distorted, almost erased, the spirit of Jesus, which was before the church and is independent of it. There can be no doubt that history has justified by the stern law of necessity the gathering and the maintenance of the Christian Church. It embraces for us, as for the fellow-

believers of Stephen and of Paul, all people who believe on God through Jesus, His well-beloved Son, and who through that belief stand in a peculiar relation of intimacy with Him. But no more with us than with Jesus is the church the object of our spiritual allegiance; our supreme devotion must, like his, be reserved for God and men. And the ultimate purpose of our lives must be not to build up a strong church but to open the human heart through all possible means to the divine spirit of Jesus.